

The Lights Will Guide You Home by theproblematicgay

Series: [The Lights Will Guide You Home \[1\]](#)

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Summary:

Billy doesn't know what he expected to find in the forest but it wasn't this.

Harrington rushes forward after a second's hesitation and Billy thinks that he has to be the most stupid, fucking idiotic, pretty- *oh, God, is that a bat full of nails? What the ever-loving fuck is happening right now?* The demon-dog-flower-thing is knocked from his chest by Harrington, who Billy can only recognise as 'King Steve': the cocky motherfucker he'd heard so much about the past month and a half and hadn't seen

a single glimpse of in all that time.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

- For [lymricks](#).

Or, Billy doesn't know whether to be confused as all Hell, concerned or amused at just how fast he ended up feeling... something, for *Harrington* of all fucking people and pretty much became the new co-babysitter of his gaggle of fucking nerds.

// Uh, disclaimer or whatever, I don't own shit. Obviously. \\

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‘And now everybody thinks that you’re the bad guy. Well, guess what, I think that you are, baby.’ -
The Neighbourhood, *U&I*

Billy made a habit of getting drunk. He knew who threw the best parties, judged them on the impressive ability to acquire enough alcohol to water down a hoard of teenagers and still have enough left that by the end of the night Billy really shouldn't be driving home. He didn't enjoy the parties. Bodies that insistently pressed up against him only brought irritation and anger and disgust that he tried *hard* not to feel. It always got too hot. But free alcohol was never something Billy would consciously or knowingly refuse.

If he woke up the next morning with bruises he didn't remember receiving upon eventually coming home, nobody needed to know.

Billy is sure that his father, all clenched fists and swinging belt is going to come charging through his bedroom door any moment now.

The latch on the window sounds ridiculously similar to a gunshot in the dead of night. He doesn't understand how Max manages to do it so quietly most nights, despite the fact that he knows every single time she sneaks out and hears almost every word of every conversation she has on that goddamn walkie. *She doesn't have to be afraid of the consequences of getting caught though*, he guesses.

He nearly drops his cigarettes on the floor and only sheer will keeps him with a now mostly-empty pack, achieving almost-silence as he clambers outside. It's cold and he doesn't have his jacket – forgot it, and doesn't want to think about the fact that it's lying on the end of his bed, merely feet away through the window. He lights a cigarette and inhales sharply.

After a few minutes of staring down the trees behind his father's house he hears the front door screech and the heavy tell-tale footsteps that he's *still* not over hearing, even though it's been years since he was first afraid of them. He ends up blanketed with shadows in the tree line, grateful and feeling sick watching his father light a cigarette too. Billy steps on his own with more aggression than would probably be deemed necessary were anyone looking.

He looks at the sky with a deep exhale and thinks that there's something *missing*. He doesn't know what it is. There's a distant feeling in his chest like there's supposed to be something tethering him to the ground he's standing on. He doesn't have a tether, he thinks.

He's grateful for the sparse light after he nearly trips over the root of a tree. A hundred million tiny pinpricks of light poking little holes in the solidity of the darkness. He doesn't want to think about the dark or he'll eventually end up thinking about the darkness that he knows must be inside of him. He sees it in the face of his father too often for it to not be instantly recognisable. Familiar.

He might still be somewhat drunk, he realises a little belatedly, almost stumbling into a bush after about fifteen minutes of aimless walking. He then proceeds to vomit over said bush and feels slightly better afterward for it.

A growl catches his attention and he spins around so violently that he hurts his neck and feels so dizzy for a moment that he worries he'll

throw up again. In the thick darkness he can make out a pretty damn large dog only a few steps from where he's swaying under the effort of standing. It must be a Rottweiler or something similar from the size and build of it, thick and dark as it is, he can tell, even in the little moonlight that there is. His uncle had had a Rottweiler once, sometime during his childhood. It had bitten him when he'd tried to pet it and his uncle had slapped him on the back, chuckling at his naivety.

It steps forward menacingly and the reality of the situation Billy's in hits him like a punch to the chest. That and the demon-dog from Hell had launched itself at Billy and pinned him to the ground in one swift movement, its weight overbearing atop his bruised ribs.

Billy knows now that he must still be drunk. Must be. Must have taken something that he can't recall too probably, because the dog's head, the snout that had been pushing into the skin just below the hollow of his throat unfolds like one of those Venus flytrap plants he'd seen once in his biology classroom in middle school back in California. Or a really ugly and terrifying flower.

Just as Billy has accepted that he's not going to make it out of this with his face, Harrington emerges from the bushes looking determined and distraught, catching sight of the thing sitting on Billy's chest like it's the puppy he'd been searching for the past hour and *thank God, he's been so worried, oh, my god, thank you for finding him*. He doesn't look surprised to see it though, seems more horrified to see Billy there if anything, trapped beneath it where its drool or whatever Billy will have to deny it is later splatters beside his head.

Harrington rushes forward after a second's hesitation and Billy thinks that he has to be the most stupid, fucking idiotic, pretty- *oh, God, is that a bat full of nails? What the ever-loving fuck is happening right now?* The demon-dog-flower-thing is knocked from his chest by Harrington, who Billy can only recognise as 'King Steve': the cocky motherfucker he'd heard so much about the past month and a half and hadn't seen a single glimpse of in all that time. Billy's grateful that he doesn't recall the time passing so quickly as he watches Steve lean over him after a minute or so where he's still lying motionless in the dirt, not attempting to get up and trying really fucking hard to not look at the now-dead thing lying only a few feet from the both of them.

He offers a reluctant hand and, surprisingly, Billy takes it without much hesitation.

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Harrington had ended up half-carrying Billy to his car where it's parked not too far from the road leading up to his father's house. He couldn't imagine going back there tonight and frankly, he doesn't want to. The car ride had been mostly silent. Billy had felt the questions, among other things, bubble up deep in his chest.

"What the fuck, Harrington?" Billy had yelled suddenly after a few minutes of driving. Harrington had jumped so hard behind the wheel that Billy had been momentarily scared that they were going to die then, in a car crash after having narrowly escaped being eaten in the grotesque mouth of whatever that had been earlier. It was preferable to say the least, but it wasn't exactly desired.

He had felt himself sobering up somewhat whilst Harrington had simply grimaced through his teeth, eyes locked on the road ahead as he said nothing, scanning the trees that they had passed almost maniacally and Billy had found that he couldn't blame him. The car ride had been filled with silence after that, and Billy is sure that he had passed out for some time before the engine had been killed.

Now, he's surprised, but then again really not upon seeing Max through the window of what he guesses must be Harrington's house. The other kids that Harrington had grown sickeningly attached to are there too, crowding around him and then retreating somewhat hastily upon noticing that he has Billy in tow when they walk through the door – not the bat that he's still wielding like he imagines he'll need it, or even that he's spattered with blood that isn't his own.

Billy can really only think that *monsters should not look like flowers* and that Harrington should *not* be this pretty, especially when he's covered in *something's* blood and still holding the goddamned bat in hand, blood and gristle still practically dripping from the protruding

nails and spattering onto the floors as nobody cares enough to make him leave it outside or at least put it down. Billy could imagine that they'd have to pry it from his hands at this point judging by the way his knuckles are white where the skin is pulled taut over the bones, gripping the bat like a lifeline.

He feels the material of the sofa on his back as he's laid down, eyes slipping shut of their own accord, and thinks absently that it must be new because it crinkles under his weight, not softened from use yet. It must be nice to afford expensive new things, Billy thinks as Harrington touches his face with the backs of his cold fingers. He finds then that he really doesn't care enough to try and stay awake.

~

He wakes up with a startled cry when something prods at his leg, jumping up and hissing when it pulls at his bruises enough to leave him gasping. The smaller one of the group of weird kids Maxine had started hanging around a while ago is standing at the end of the sofa looking like a miniature version of the blond guy in some of his classes, only more regretful.

It's morning and Billy isn't sure where he is or whose sofa he'd crashed on last night but he vaguely remembers some dream he'd had; something about flowers and dogs, and for some reason Harrington had been there, and *oh, God-*

"What the *fuck?*" He barks after a pause where he grips his hair in a trembling fist, startling the kid who steps back a little and shouts to someone in another room, but Billy doesn't hear.

Harrington nearly crashes into the doorframe just seconds later, coming to stand by the kid he hadn't actually meant to frighten. He's just glad right now that he's alive and not drunk and grateful Harrington doesn't have that fucking bat anymore, despite the fact that he looks prepared to go and get it from wherever it must be lying around. There must be a God, 'cause it looks like he'd taken a shower too, now that he's no longer blood-stained. He should thank

Harrington for saving his ass, probably, but he won't.

"Harrington?" He grinds out, sounding more unhinged and unsure than he really wanted to with his fists clenched at his sides as he feels his chest wavering slightly with the waves of panic he's trying desperately to stave off. He hasn't felt this out of control since-

"Billy?" Harrington steps forward hesitantly. "Billy, look at me." Billy reluctantly raises his gaze from his shoes, hands curling and uncurling erratically at his sides. Harrington steps forward into his space and while he speaks quietly his voice is firm. "It's okay." He tries and when Billy doesn't answer, staring absently to the right of Harrington's stupid fucking head, he reaches out slowly and takes Billy's wrist.

He tows Billy into the kitchen by his arm, tugging him along beside him like a broken-down car when Billy doesn't yank his hand back with one of his usual sneers, instead trying not to feel too shocked by the warmth seeping through his skin from the fingers curled around his wrist. In the kitchen, the group of kids that Harrington happily lives to babysit and drive around like their personal chauffeur are sat bickering heatedly at the table. They pause, momentarily silenced and wide-eyed with spoons of cereal held midway to their mouths when they see Billy.

A bowl is held out beneath his nose when he looks down again, unsure of himself where he's left standing awkwardly beside the fridge and looks up to see Harrington levelling him with an expression on his face that practically screams *eat it or I'll shove it down your throat*. Henderson looks torn between openly glaring in his direction through narrowed eyes and trying to have an in-depth conversation with Harrington through just eye-contact. He eats silently. Robotically. Trying not to look as out of place as he feels.

He doesn't know what to do with the bowl once it's empty so he just holds it in his hands, ridiculously grateful for the way that it hides how they're shaking a little.

Sinclair, the kid that's clearly infatuated with Max is practically hissing at Henderson. "It was *your* fault." He can hear the way Henderson gears up to argue back. "You put the rest of us in danger 'cause you wanted a pet."

“He missed me!” Henderson protests vehemently, sitting up a little straighter in his seat.

“It just missed having access to an easy meal!” Billy watches Harrington listen to them, eating his cereal and refilling the bowl when it gets empty. He looks tired. No, he looks exhausted, and Billy can’t find that he blames him. If he squints a little he can see the faint shadows of what’s left of that night those weeks ago now, small splotches of colour staining his skin here and there as he shifts under the bare bulb of the kitchen light. Billy has to duck his head to avoid looking like a deer in fucking headlights when Harrington’s eyes flick over to him.

Sinclair starts arguing with Henderson about- *darts*? Billy’s really not drunk enough to deal with this shit right now. He doesn’t know how it all came down to this moment: mesmerised by Harrington glaring into a mug of coffee, his fucking little gaggle of nerds arguing about something Billy doesn’t understand – doesn’t really want to – whilst he’s eating Harrington’s cereal, the guy he’d beaten to a bloody pulp last month as he sort-of-guiltily wonders whether he should apologise for that. Probably. He hadn’t felt sorry when he did it, nor had he afterward, but watching Harrington now with his temples tinged with colour has Billy avoiding his eyes.

Max is babbling something, sounding simultaneously concerned and pissed off but he doesn’t hear her. He’s too busy trying to imagine how one would go about apologising for having been well on their way to killing someone. Harrington doesn’t strike him as a bunch-of-flowers kind of guy.

He looks at Max then – just properly looks at her for the first time since he’d first met that stubborn and freckled little eight year old some four, five years ago, back when he’d been only twelve himself. He’d had short hair back then, tight blonde curls atop his head and wide blue eyes that had been filled with excitement at the idea of having a sister, and maybe a mom again. Max had only come up to his shoulder then, tiny. She still did. It hadn’t stopped her from squaring up to him just days before though, demanding to know why his eye was black, yelling in retaliation and calling him an asshole when he told her to fuck off, trying to avoid the question.

Max was everything Billy would hope for in a sister, if he wanted one. She was everything he wished he was.

After Harrington's kids empty their bowls like ravenous carnivores and finish arguing over fucking darts of all things the doorbell echoes through the house. What surprises him is that nobody gets up, just stays where they are despite snapping their heads round in the direction of the door. A girl he's never seen before, probably around the same age as Max, walks in and takes in the scene. They make quite a group – an asshole like himself, a pretty boy like Harrington and five absurdly nerdy kids all stopped dead in their tracks to stare at her. Apparently they must know her 'cause Harrington smiles at her, if a little strained, and one of the kids rushes up to her like a puppy, looking entirely too smitten and all too willing to go and get her the fucking moon. Billy has to restrain himself from rolling his eyes. He mustn't do a very good job of it 'cause Harrington smirks a little, glancing at him from the corner of his eye.

"El, we don't know what we're supposed to do. We tried to find the rest of them but they're just *gone*."

"Steve said there's more than one just running around in the forest."

"Can you find them? What if they hurt someone? Hopper's gonna have a cow if he finds out that we-"

The girl, El, waves her hand and they all shut up simultaneously. Billy likes this kid. She needs to stick around if Billy's going to have any hope of keeping his sanity. And she needs to teach him whatever that was. She's wearing dark dungarees and a striped shirt, similar to one he'd seen Wheeler's brother wear sometimes. Her hair is short, awkward and it curls at the nape of her neck.

She turns to him then and frowns. Billy's surprised at how much he doesn't like being on the receiving end of some girls grimace. It's more than concerned or confused – it seems to cut into his fucking soul and he hates it. She steps toward him and the entire room seems to hold its breath as she stares him down despite having to tilt her head to meet his eyes as close as she is. She sticks her hand out somewhat mechanically, although the look on her face is anything but cold, as if she's actively trying to remember social etiquette. She

looks like she's trying pretty goddamn hard. Billy would know. Some days it's hard to grind out a 'good morning', even to try and avoid the inevitable fallout just that little while longer. His father had never needed a reason though. *What did we talk about?*

Her face seems to fall a little then and Billy isn't sure what to do as he watches her curious expression crumple, quickly replaced with something akin to understanding. Her hand reaches out further, with purpose and her lips pull tight as her face becomes conflicted. Her fingertips brush softly against his upper arm where underneath his short sleeves he knows must be the dark rings of finger-shaped bruises by now. He flinches a little and sees in his peripheral how everyone stiffens. She stays steady, touch gentle but solid.

She nods at him ever so slightly, her voice a soft whisper. "Papa."

He crosses the room and sits down a little aggressively on the sofa, rigid.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

Billy didn't know what he expected to find in the forest but it wasn't this.

'Mama said if I really want to, then I can change. [...] Mama, there is only so much I can do. Tough for you to witness but it was for me too.' The Neighbourhood – *R.I.P. 2 My Youth*

Harrington had eventually had to sit down beside him and tell him everything. Well, not everything. God, Billy wasn't sure he whether he would've wanted to know everything, not after the first minute of listening to Harrington try and explain shit that really shouldn't ever have to be explained.

The kids had all gone upstairs to snoop after Harrington had given them the option, practically shoving them out the door while Billy was trying to wrap his head around- *fuck*, monsters. He knew they existed, sure. Hell, he lived under the same fucking roof as one. But not one with a face that opened up like a goddamn flower and tried to eat him. One that came from some sort of gate that apparently they had all thought was closed. From another fucking world – "*Dimension*, Steve." "Does it look like he gives a shit what you call it, Dustin?" – right under their goddamn noses. A gate that was going to be found and closed by El. Again, apparently. *Christ*. Billy wasn't sure if he was never gonna be able to fucking sleep again.

Harrington finished talking, finally, and puts his head in his hands. After a few moments where Billy doesn't speak, doesn't make any noise or move whatsoever, he turns his head, as if making sure that Billy is okay, as if he could be after that shitstorm, or at least still there, not running screaming down the street. He sighs and puts a hand on his shoulder.

"So, yeah. Any questions?" Billy isn't really sure how to fucking

respond to that. What the fuck?

He stares at Harrington incredulously, head snapping toward him with an audible crack that actually hurts a little but he doesn't give enough of a shit about to care. He laughs a little breathlessly, a probably manic grin spreading over his face and exposing his bared teeth. It drops from his face just as quickly as it's put on though as he leans back on the couch and asks Harrington where he keeps his liquor.

"There're kids in the house. Hopper'll kill me." At Billy's bewildered expression Harrington explains offhandedly, "He's coming to take the kids home on his way back in about an hour."

What, can't hold your liquor, Harrington?" He says it like a challenge.

Harrington sighs, heaving himself up and smiling somewhat when Billy doesn't really bother to follow him as if he expected that he would. Billy's still feeling a little too shaken to try and stand at this point. "Don't forget the good stuff. I know you're loaded now, pretty boy." He yells when he hears cabinets opening in the kitchen. Harrington comes back with two tumblers and a mostly-full bottle of expensive-looking scotch.

"Went for the shittier stuff. Probably what you're used to, drinking with Tommy and all." Harrington shrugs, making an exaggeratedly casual expression as he gestures to the bottle that had to have cost a small fortune, laughing a little.

Billy rolls his eyes. "That shitstain's got no fuckin' taste." He grumbles, grabbing his glass and watching Harrington's throat work as he takes a long sip.

"Why d'you bother with him then?" Harrington looks genuinely curious, so Billy decides it's only fair to grace him with a genuine answer.

"S'got it's perks, I guess." Like not spending his weekends alone, or stuck in the same house as his dad. Harrington shrugs, nodding a little. "At least he's my age." He jerks his head toward the sound of

screeching from upstairs.

It's Harrington's turn to roll his eyes at that point. "Everyone our age is either an asshole or done with me." Billy doesn't think Harrington meant for that answer to sound so heartfelt and sees him think the same thing, the surprise in his eyes. He knows he ticks one of those boxes, not sure how he could ever be the other. Not after this.

Billy shrugs, trying for nonchalant.

Half an hour passes in this way, the bottle, now less than half-full has begun to work its way to their heads judging by the way Billy smiles, too wide, when Harrington jumps out of his skin at Billy's touch. His hand rests on Harrington's thigh, his knee pressed up against his where he knows Harrington can feel the warmth of him through their jeans. A deep flush has settled underneath Harrington's skin and Billy isn't sure whether his proximity or the alcohol is to blame. Harrington stumbles on through whatever story he's telling though, as if Billy isn't almost strewn over him, or at least looking very much like he wants to be.

Harrington seems to lose his train of thought then, lips parting around the word he's just lost and eyes glancing down as if he's expecting to see it scrawled on his hand. It takes a moment for Billy to realise that he's blinking at the hand on his leg. Billy throws back whatever's left in his glass and sets it on the coffee table, relaxing back into the sofa and making little circles with his thumb over the material of Harrington's jeans. Harrington's tongue flicks across his bottom lip that'd gone dry and he pointedly doesn't raise his eyes.

He takes Harrington's glass, staying pressed up against him and relishing in the way Harrington seems to loosen up, in the unsteady breaths just barely brushing against his shoulder. He hesitantly reaches up, calloused fingertips fleetingly grazing Harrington's jaw. His palm spans the stretch of skin at his throat and Billy feels the sudden intensity of *want*, wanting to bite a bruise there. He wants to fucking devour Steve; both devastate and envelop him completely. At the touch of his hand, brown eyes flicker up to meet his, wide and too trusting, not wary like they should be. As if he wanted this just as much as Billy did. Billy seriously doubted that, what with the warmth now unbearable in his chest, threatening to reduce him to embers,

inside-out.

Billy rushes forward, catching Steve's mouth against his own in an almost violent graze of their lips. He feels how Steve's hand tightens into a fist against his thigh, eyes widening before ultimately fluttering shut. His lips are unexpectedly soft, though Billy doesn't know what he expected, and there's a lingering taste of the scotch that only serves to draw him in further, chasing the flavour. He sucks in a sharp breath through his nose – and Steve's all that he can smell. That goddamn hairspray he uses that Billy can only recognise 'cause there's a can of it in his room, the same cigarette smoke that Billy can't seem to get out of his clothes, and then something abruptly and entirely Steve that Billy can't say he's ever known before. He's addicted before he even exhales.

Steve pulls back though after a moment, a hand pushing against his chest, only ever gentle yet sending Billy struggling back, retracting his hands somewhat reluctantly but off of Steve nonetheless. Steve's eyes catch him entirely unguarded, every wall he's ever built ripped down with just a stare, something akin to fondness. The hand on his cheek is cold against his warmth and Billy wraps his own around it, fingers trembling. He doesn't even acknowledge how his chest is heaving because Steve's is too.

This time it's Steve who leans into him, slow and soft. His hand curls around the nape of his neck, fingers tangling in the blonde curls there, pulling a little. And it's the gentleness of it that does it, that has Billy pushing forward, arms encircling Steve and tilting him back into the cushions, blanketing his frame with his bulk. Steve's other hand is clutching at his shirt, tugging him closer until they might as well never separate, comfortable and content as they are. Billy's never wanted to stay right where he is quite so much in his life.

Billy's hand, the one that isn't angling the scotch away from where they're pressed together, trails down the material of Steve's blue pullover fervently before wrenching it up, fingers reaching for the exposed skin eagerly. He pulls back from Steve's lips, still holding his jumper up and attaches his lips to one of Steve's nipples after kissing and nipping his way down Steve's throat. Steve lets out a strangled whine, throwing his head back as his hips drive up ardently into Billy, once, twice. As he rolls the pink little bud between his teeth his

hand moves further, fingers curling around the waistband of Steve's jeans and dipping beneath them just enough to graze the softer skin there.

Steve's breath hitches and he seems to gather himself, sitting up against the arm of the sofa but not forgetting to drag Billy with him who's still hovering with his knees either side of Steve's legs. He looks utterly fucked, hair a mess and lips bitten from muffling his sounds. He hurriedly pulls his jumper back down.

"We can't," He tries, chest heaving and Billy just has to smirk in response, attaching his mouth back to Steve's neck.

"Sure we can," Billy chuckles, his hand reaching to cup Steve's jaw once again, keeping him there beneath him as their legs begin to tangle together as Steve shifts, his muffled groans escaping against Billy's mouth.

A shock of red hair eventually catches his attention in his peripheral and it's like being drenched with cold water. He jerks himself away from Harrington, ridiculously thankful for the fact that she hadn't been a minute later and nearly spills the scotch down his and Harrington's fronts. He jumps up, leaving Harrington looking entirely too bewildered and downright debauched with his hair mussed and lips red and swollen where he's slumped into the sofa, knocking his shin into the edge of the coffee table with a wince. The mortification is enough for him to calm himself down almost immediately and within seconds he feels a hell of a lot more sober. His heart's still racing though, maybe faster now.

Max doesn't say anything, her eyes wider than he's seen them in a long time and lips parted in what Billy thinks is probably disbelief. He barely believes it himself. She looks as though she's trying to say something, or had only come to tell them something in the first place but she just lets out a little scandalised noise that has Billy striding past her and out the front door.

In the car, Billy's hands are white-knuckled on the wheel, shaking a little but that isn't really noticeable he's grateful to find as he stares at them, waiting for Max to *hurry the fuck up and get in already* before hastily pulling out of Harrington's drive. There are no other cars on

the road that he passes. Max is silent beside him, clearly thoughtful. He doesn't think about Harrington, left on the sofa with blossoming little bruises on his neck that *Billy* had put there.

He pulls up on the curb two streets away from their house. "I don't know what you think you saw, Maxine, but-" He stops as she levels him with a glare.

"I know what I saw, Billy." She practically spits, her voice laced with venom. "Don't talk to me as if I'm eight again."

His mouth snaps shut and he doesn't know what else to do other than hit his head on the steering wheel, gritting his teeth and trying not to yell when he grinds out, "You can't tell anyone." He hates that he sounds as if he's pleading with her, because he isn't.

She holds her hard stare for a minute, arms crossed over her chest before she asks, "Do you love Steve?"

The question catches him so off guard that he chokes a little on his next breath, pulling a muscle in his neck when he whips around to face her too fast. "What?"

She's unfazed. "Do you love Steve?" He gapes at her a little incredulously, eyes narrowed. "You were... kissing him," She falters. "And stuff." Mumbling, her cheeks turn red and she shrugs a little too stiffly. Billy would bark out a relatively hysterical laugh if he knew it wouldn't be stifled with the mortification.

"You can't tell my dad." He rasps, trying not to think too hard about that.

He's grateful that she doesn't say *that doesn't answer the question* like he's thinking. She just continues staring, something calculating in her gaze. She gives a minute nod though after a few seconds and turns back to glaring out the window like it'd done her wrong.

When he climbs into bed later on he abandons his jeans, tossing them in the corner, but he leaves his shirt on, which has absolutely nothing to do with the fact that it still smells like Harrington's there beside him, that it lets Billy pretend that the cold he can feel where his leg

hangs out of the covers is Harrington's skin pressed against his. He turns his face into the pillow, desperate to smother... *whatever* this is. It doesn't change the fact he can still feel that lingering warmth deep in his chest.

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Harrington calls him at something-past eleven and Billy has to scramble out of bed to silence the phone before the second ring, holding it against his chest for a minute, listening to Harrington's voice from the other end of the line before he holds it up to his ear, less convinced his dad is actually gonna murder him for taking phone calls this time of night when he has to head to work at six.

"What the Hell do you want, Harrington?" He whispers furiously.

There's silence for a moment before Harrington actually responds, a little tentative. "I don't know."

"What the fuck are you calling me for then?" He runs his hand through his hair with a sigh. "Is it..." He doesn't know how to ask, has the stupid feeling that Harrington's going to ask what the Hell he's talking about like none of it ever happened and he was just hit a little too hard that night.

"You remember how I said there were more?" He grunts in confirmation. "Well, just be careful. Okay?" Billy knows that the rest of them can't be far, given that the one that attacked him had only been a fifteen minute walk from his house.

"You think I'm an idiot, Harrington? I'm not gonna go walkabout now that I know what's out there. Some of us don't actually have a death wish, you know?"

"You sure Max hasn't snuck out or something?" Harrington sounds a little concerned. Billy guessed that was probably one of the main responsibilities of being the babysitter to his little flock of dorks. "El was worried about something." He explains after a moment.

Billy blanches, pinching the bridge of his nose with a defeated sigh. "Hang on."

He sets the phone down on his bed, stepping over the cord before making his way to Max's room. He doesn't bother knocking on the door, half-expecting her to launch one of the ends of her broken skateboard at him for it (which was his fault, actually) but she's out cold, hair a wild mess fanning out around her head, an arm and a leg hanging out of the bed and her mouth open a little. He'd take a picture if he had a camera. He commits it to memory instead with a little smirk.

He's trailing back to his room from the kitchen, back to tell Harrington that he could look out for his own goddamn step-sister with a glass of water in hand when he nearly runs into his dad. He stops dead in his tracks and almost drops the glass.

"Dad." He falters, scrambling to think of what his father's expecting.

He's met with a cold stare. "Where did you disappear to last night? You weren't there when Susan checked. She was worried."

"I- I..." He can't say that he doesn't know, and he knows that it'd effectively be suicide if he said *I went out*. He doesn't finish his sentence, looking at the floor and concentrating too hard on the cold tiles underneath his feet.

His dad takes the water from his hand and sets it gently on the kitchen counter, the ring on his finger tapping lightly against the glass. Billy doesn't move from where he's stood, rooted to the floor, almost out of the kitchen.

~

Harrington opens the door and his eyes, exhausted and narrowed, widen almost comically. "Billy?"

He knows how he looks. There's blood on the collar of his shirt, the

one he'd haphazardly thrown on before stumbling to his car, and he can feel where it's dried on his face, congealed on his lip in an uncomfortable clump. He opens his mouth and he feels when the blood starts to trickle again. He sighs when he's practically yanked inside by the shirt.

Harrington seems more of a mess than he does, and that's saying something. Billy watches him pace the floor of the kitchen from where he's sat on the counter holding the frozen peas that'd been shoved at him to his cheek. He can imagine the blooming blue bruise and tries to ignore the ache in his side. He focuses on Harrington instead. He doesn't notice Billy's eyes on him as he tears through cabinets, searching. His eyes linger on Harrington's neck, the blossoming red mark that'd been sucked into his skin only hours earlier.

"What happened?" Harrington pulls out a first aid box and rifles through it. "El called me before 'cause she thought something was up. She didn't know if they'd moved 'cause she couldn't get a good look at whatever—"

"Harrington." Billy grinds out, cheek pressed into the slowly warming bag of peas.

"She knew it was near you and Max, though. She called 'cause she wanted to make sure—"

He moves to stand between Billy's legs, pulling the bag aside and pressing his hand gently to the bruise. For once, he feels warm. "Harrington." Billy snaps, though quietly. "It wasn't those dog-things."

"Then who—" He starts as he grabs for one of the alcohol wipes, dabbing at Billy's split lip.

"Does it fucking matter?" He hisses and regrets it almost immediately; the way Harrington makes to step back before he steels himself makes Billy feel like an asshole. He pauses, hesitant, but ultimately mutters, "My dad."

Harrington's eyes harden and Billy marvels at the flush that creeps up

his neck, highlighting the bruise Billy'd bitten there before. "Asshole." For a minute, Billy thinks Harrington is speaking to him but he recognises the contained rage in his expression, one he's worn himself.

"Yeah," He fingers the counter absently, not sure what else he could do other than agree. Because, yeah, his dad is an asshole, but also because Billy thinks that he could never argue with Harrington when he's like this, all suppressed outrage – for *Billy*. He can't imagine ever becoming tired of that. The *want* flares in his chest again, and along with it, the ache in his ribs.

Harrington must notice his wince because the next minute he's pulling Billy's shirt aside, undoing the last few buttons. "Surprised I even need to fucking undo them." He hears him mutter under his breath and Billy smiles, looking down at him as he abandons the buttons in the end, just rucking it up instead when his fingers keep slipping.

"If you wanted me out of my shirt, Harrington, all you had to do was ask." He smirks to hide the smile, coquettish.

"Shut up." Harrington rolls his eyes but hisses through his teeth in sympathy when he sees the skin there, an amalgamation of vibrant blue and deep red.

Billy sees the colours burst behind his eyelids when Harrington gently touches him with the backs of his fingers, closing his eyes tightly and gritting his teeth. Harrington looks a little lost when he opens his eyes again.

"I don't think anything's broken." His voice falls flat even though he tries to smile up at Billy, settling his hand on his thigh as the other reaches for painkillers.

"I'll be fine." Billy assures him even though Harrington doesn't seem to be comforted by it. "I've had worse." He tries instead but that really only makes it worse.

Harrington looks pained and that was the opposite of what Billy was going for. "Jesus, Billy." He rolls his eyes at him, dismissing the

concern.

Billy wants to kiss him again, wants to kiss that goddamned look off of his face. He'd been thinking about it before the son of a bitch had called, staring at the ceiling and imagining how he could get Harrington on board to do it again. Even if it would've had to involve alcohol, a near-death experience and goddamn monsters in order to do it. It was worth it. Billy realises, the thought delayed somewhat, that he *could* kiss Harrington. His face was close enough for Billy to just be able to do it. He might be a little bit high on adrenaline and pain and how Harrington's hands are flitting under his shirt but he was sure that he could. Harrington hadn't stopped him the first time, hadn't pushed him off and called him a faggot – had instead pulled him closer and *kissed Billy back*.

He fists his hand in Harrington's shirt and tugs him forward on impulse. Harrington's forced to lift his head or end up crushed against Billy's chest. He makes a surprised noise, muffled against Billy's mouth, his hand hovering over Billy's shoulder as if he isn't sure where to put it. His legs wrap a little around Harrington's waist, pulling him against the counter where he leans up to meet Billy's mouth with his own as his hands cup Steve's face, silently begging him to stay right where he is.

And all of a sudden, it isn't just about wanting to touch him – Billy wants to get rid of that goddamn warmth in his chest. It's building with every minute, slow and unbearable.

They break apart, breathing heavy, staring at one another for a minute. Steve eventually tosses him a blanket, looking very much like a deer in headlights. "Stay the night." And something in Billy can't refuse him that. It scares him how much he really doesn't want to.

So Billy had ended up lying on the sofa and listening to the Harrington's house breathe, fingering his mother's necklace absently as he whispered under his breath, voice low and muted. He thought of his mother sometimes. He didn't like to, because he knew no amount of remembering could make her appear in front of him or expel the feeling in his throat that had first been there when he was six, standing under his father's arm as a priest had read her last rites. He couldn't remember anything other than her pale skin, eyes dim

when she had kissed his forehead. It felt wrong to remember her like that. He felt guilty for not being able to remember her *before*. Her hands had been cold when she had held his, telling him that he would be okay, telling him there was a place called Heaven. Billy didn't consider himself religious. Not because he didn't believe, but because he had been done with whatever higher power there might've been since he was eight, knowing then how his mother must've felt lying in that hospital bed two years earlier, refusing to forgive his father for the first time.

Billy pulls the blanket up to bury his face in it and he revels in how it smells like Steve. He's thinking of how he's gonna tell Harrington he needed a new sofa, something more comfortable, when a yell shattered the silence. He tore the blanket off and practically leapt from the room, taking the stairs two at a time. Harrington had sounded *scared*. Crashing into his bedroom probably wasn't the smartest plan but he had been too preoccupied with the thought of what could make Harrington yell like that. The thought was followed by the immediate image of Harrington struggling, stuck underneath the bulk of a demo-dog. *Still a stupid fucking name for a thing that tried to eat my fucking face a couple days ago—*

Harrington is sat upright in bed, blankets pooled at his waist and revealing how his shirt's stuck to him, skin sweat-slick and clearly hot. Despite the way Harrington seems to be burning up inside and out, he's shivering, arms jolting every few seconds under the strain of trying to keep still. His eyes are wide, drawn to the corner of the room where the shadows seemed to convalesce, swelling in the darkness. Billy reached for the light switch.

Harrington jerks hard, head snapping toward Billy as if now only noticing he was there. His gaze claws back to the corner every few seconds as his chest heaves, wrenching breaths that sound painful. His hands are fisted in the blankets and Billy notices the way his legs draw up under the covers.

There was nothing in the room. Harrington had had a nightmare, and by looks of it, was still caught up in the thick of it. Billy stepped forward carefully, raising his hands and stepping lightly. Harrington stared at him, looking shocked. Billy was a little shocked himself, at his own gentleness. When he reached out slowly to- Billy doesn't

know what. He's never comforted someone after a nightmare before. When he reaches forward though, Harrington flinches and he pulls his hand back as if burnt.

"Harrington," Billy falters, unsure of what exactly he should do.

"I'm fine." His voice is wrecked, thick with sleep and terror that's still clear in his eyes. "Sorry I woke you." Harrington won't make eye contact with him, ducking his head and Billy just wants to make it better but doesn't know how.

He stands there for what must be a long few minutes until Steve isn't gasping anymore, isn't glancing wildly around the room. In the end, Billy just leaves when Harrington lies back down, turning so that Billy can't see his face anymore. After trailing back downstairs to his sofa, trying really fucking hard not to feel defeated, Billy finds himself listening out. He could swear he could hear Harrington breathe if he listened for it long enough.

Billy is half-awake, drifting, when Steve sneaks into the room. He has a thick blanket wrapped tightly around his shoulders and sends Billy a glance, a stiff something-like-a-shrug of his shoulders as he settles on the floor in front of the sofa, leaning against it. Another ten minutes pass before Billy is tired enough to think *fuck it* and curls a loose fist in the back of Harrington's shirt without opening his eyes, dragging him up onto the sofa and reluctantly offering up his warmth to combat Harrington's shivers.

Harrington's hair is soft where it brushes against his throat, forehead cold in contrast to the skin of Billy's bare chest, but Billy finds with surprise that he doesn't mind, hand splayed across Harrington's back.

"Isn't this gay?" Harrington mumbles, voice muffled against Billy's skin and low with sleep.

Billy stifles a snort, smirking into Steve's hair. "Shut up and go to sleep, Harrington."

3. Chapter 3

Summary for the Chapter:

Too Young to Fall in Love – Motley Crue is the perfect song for this btw. I recommend.

Another thing I also recommend is anything by Lymricks who is utterly fantastic. The *You'll Lose the Blues in Chicago* series are my favourite, as well as just my favourite fics for Billy & Steve in general. So, yeah, go read them if you haven't already. You'll thank me.

Happy belated Easter, y'all. I hope a giant anthropomorphised rabbit visited you in your sleep and left you some chocolate.

Notes for the Chapter:

'I want to sleep next to you, but that's all I want to do right now. And I want to come home to you, but home is just a room full of my safest sounds.' – *Talk Me Down*

Billy had stayed the next night, as well as the night after. Harrington had only had to ask. Billy was *fucked*. He'd been woken up at five by Harrington's tossing and turning and stayed lying awake where he'd climbed in the bed beside him after there'd been another nightmare. Billy wasn't sure how he was ever going to be able to go home – how he was going to be convinced to drag himself away from Harrington and out of his bed come the morning. Billy thinks he's never dreaded school so much in his life.

He leaves at six after an hour of watching Harrington sleep like an absolute creep. Billy doesn't care. He sits in the camaro outside his house for fifteen minutes before heading inside, fishing his key out of his pocket and thanking God that it hadn't fell out when he'd thrown his jeans on Harrington's floor. He's mostly successful at being quiet, tripping on the rug, but his dad doesn't come out of his room so he's in the clear, he figures.

Billy doesn't know what's wrong with him. He knows his dad would have fucking skinned him alive if he'd caught him doing half of what he's done, knows Tommy and everybody fucking else would never let it go, knows that Harrington doesn't deserve this shit or what could happen if they weren't careful – yet he'd done it anyway. He'd gone ahead and fucked them both, really. He still doesn't regret it if he's honest, though. He lies down on his bed, jeans and all.

It should've been easy, to pretend. He should've chosen some girl, pretended to fall in love with her, fucked her, married her, made her hate him in the end and become his fucking dad with his own goddamn mistake that he hated. It would've been fucking easier than this. Easier than choosing Harrington instead, like a goddamn idiot. It doesn't even matter that it's Harrington, or even the fact that he's *a Harrington*. It just matters that he's not soft, not some girl like everyone else expects. Billy thinks he likes the fact that he's not – likes the hard edges, the rough hands, how he smells – goddamn it, everything. Even though Harrington is soft in some ways, but different to how a girl's soft, though. His hair, his eyes, his goddamn mouth. *Fuck*.

He hears his dad leave and blinks away the sleep still in his eyes. He gets up reluctantly and heads for the kitchen, steals Max's coffee and sticks his tongue out at her scowl. He knows his hair is plastered to his forehead, feels how the curls are a mess atop his head but ultimately doesn't bother, just actively avoids his reflection. Max is sat at the table, waiting for him to finish her coffee and he can feel her eyes on him but he doesn't look at her. He's afraid of what she'll see if he does.

In the car, he forgoes the music and just listens to the silence instead, thinking hard about what the fuck he's supposed to do now. Max is staring at him again.

"What?" He snaps, keeping his eyes locked ahead, not wanting to look at her.

She's silent for a minute. "You're different." She's smiling a little when he glances at her in his peripheral.

He frowns. "How?"

"Just are." She's smiling until he parks the camaro in front of the school, getting out and seeing her friends sprinting toward them.

"Steve won't answer." Henderson's panicking. Sinclair, the one who likes Max, doesn't seem to be doing much better.

"He's probably still asleep." He grumbles and Max looks at him then, something knowing in her eyes and he regrets opening his fucking mouth. The other two narrow their eyes at him though.

"Did you do something to him, asshole?" He leans against the camaro, a little smirk playing at his lips.

"Why?" He lights a cigarette. "Do you think I would?"

"You nearly killed him a few weeks ago!"

"Dustin," Max barks, drawing his attention. "Steve is fine. He's just not answering right now. We'll see him later anyway, he's picking us up at the arcade, remember?"

The kid deflates a little and they all make to head off to their classes, but he hears one of them mutter, "Not if he's been eaten." He also hears how Max smacks him upside the head before he shouts. Billy thinks to how he'd left Harrington that morning, dead to the world and drooling a little into his pillow. He thinks of the thing that'd been sat on his chest just a few days ago.

He flicks his cigarette onto the pavement with a heavy sigh after another few seconds, deliberating. "Harrington, you asshole." He gets in the car, not seeing that stupid BMW in the parking lot.

He grits his teeth when he doesn't see Harrington's car as he pulls up on the curb, pulling on a fistful of his hair in frustration. *Harrington, I swear to God, if you haven't been eaten I'm going to fucking kill you myself.*

He drives around for a while but he doesn't see the car anywhere. He just doesn't want to see it where it's parked haphazardly alongside the forest, just two blocks from his house. He gets out and looks

inside, finds it unlocked and lets out a string of swears, cursing Harrington to high fucking Hell.

He stumbles through the trees, trying not to trip on the roots and listening out for anything. *Anything*, goddamn it, anything is better than silence. He doesn't know what else to do other than yell for Steve, hoping nothing else hears him instead. *Come on, Harrington.*

"Billy?" He stops dead in his tracks as he spots Harrington, looking confused as Hell and holding a can of gasoline, a bucket and his backpack slung over his shoulder, a familiar bat sticking out of it.

"What the fuck, Harrington?" Billy snarls, noticing that girl, El and Wheeler's brother are standing not far off, also evidently confused.

"What are you doing here?" He drops the gasoline and the bucket as Billy shoves him, getting in his face, like he had at the Byers' a few weeks ago.

"What am *I* doing here?" Billy spits. "What the fuck are you doing? Dragging two kids out here when there's fucking-"

"Technically, they dragged me here." Harrington murmurs, trying to pull at Billy's fist where it's gripping the front of his shirt.

Billy knows he isn't actually angry. Fuck it, he's relieved. He just doesn't want Harrington to know that. Steve's here and he's *fine*, *God*. He knows he should say *I was worried* and not *You're an asshole* but he can see that Harrington understands it anyway, how he hears the relief and exasperation in his voice. He's caught off guard when he figures out that that feeling, that fucking warmth in his chest is the fact that he wants to wake up next to Harrington again. Specifically, tomorrow morning.

Billy laughs despite everything, if a little hysterical. He surprises even himself when he yanks Harrington forward, wrapping his arms around him as he stumbles into Billy's chest. *What the Hell am I doing?* he has enough clarity to think, at the least. He pulls back, admittedly a little too fast and maybe with a too-casual cough, patting Harrington's shoulder. The kids are looking at him like he's grown a second head in the matter of seconds. Harrington looks a

little bewildered himself. He looks down at the gasoline, then at the bucket which is filled with pieces of raw meat. At his expression, Harrington shrugs.

“Worked last time.” He scratches the back of his neck, looking like he’s now not so sure of himself. Billy doesn’t understand what the fuck is going on anymore.

“Why are they here?” He jerks his head towards the two kids and Harrington looks like he’s going to say something but he’s beaten to it.

“He’s our muscle.” The kid replies, outright glaring at him.

Billy snickers. It’s Harrington’s turn to frown then, hitting him with his shoulder as he rolls his eyes at the kid. He stops when El steps forward, though, her eyes on him as she nods to herself, curls bouncing atop her head.

“Come.”

~

It turns out that the bucket and gasoline were actually part of a plan – a suicidal plan, but a plan nonetheless he’s grateful to find out. He still doesn’t see how or why they’re relying on a little girl, sticking their necks out in the hope that she’ll be able to stop whatever they’re expecting to happen. Whatever it is that they’re expecting, Billy knows it has to be bad. Steve looks terrified behind the face he’s putting on for the kids. How do little girls get caught up in this shit? Even ones that are apparently a little bit psychic.

They’re waiting. Hidden in the shadows, behind a horde of trees closely pressed together, Billy and Steve keep an eye out, watching the clearing just ahead of them. El had drifted off somewhere, insisting they stay quiet and stay where they are. The kid – “It’s *Mike*, asshole. And I’m not a kid.” – is sitting a ways from them, also keeping a look out. Steve’s doing the same, but Billy’s too busy

looking at him.

“What do you think’s going to happen?” He asks, gentle, maybe a little uneasy.

“I think that we’re going to be fine.” Steve smiles at him, shaking his head. “It’s going to work, Billy.” And Billy nods, pretending like that chases his anxiety away. They both pretend that Harrington doesn’t notice that he’s pretending.

“Guys,” Mike calls unsurely.

They snap their attention back to the clearing, seeing how there are two of those goddamn things circling the bait. But they’re not taking any of it. He involuntarily decides that they’re definitely worse to see in broad daylight, and Billy can’t help but think that that’s it, the plan’s gone to shit, they’re fucked-

“Harrington, they’re not eating it.” He wants to ask just how intelligent these things are but thinks that he probably doesn’t want to hear the answer.

“We only needed it to get them here.” Steve shucks off his bag, takes out the bat and grips it with both hands, coming to stand in front of Billy and whispering at him to stay where he is.

Billy doesn’t have time to ask what he’s doing because in the next five seconds Steve’s gone, heading straight for those fucking things. One of them lunges at Steve and Billy doesn’t know what the fuck he’s going to do if he-

“Mike,” Steve yells, grunting as he swings the bat hard. “Now.”

The dog, if he can call it that, is thrown aside but Steve doesn’t have enough time to tear the bat back, the nails speared in the side of the thing before another one is bowling him over. Steve hits the ground hard, the bat clattering when it drops from his hand and rolls a few feet. Then all of a sudden, there are flames sweeping across the clearing. Billy looks across to Mike who’s holding his lighter to the trail of gasoline-drenched grass. The plan had worked; the dogs are trapped, cut off by the fire, but Steve is too. He’s lying there, just like

Billy had been, stuck underneath the weight of the thing on top of him. It's threatening to lurch forward, face opening up and revealing rows of tiny needle-like teeth and Billy can't tear his eyes away as he's running. He grabs the bat and sends the dog flying as Steve scrambles onto his hands and knees, coughing when he gets a lungful of smoke.

Billy brings the bat down on the thing's head, planting his foot in its side as he wrenches the bat back and swings it at the next dog that's headed straight for him, sending it veering into the flames where it writhes as its skin begins to bubble. The air seems heavy and he slings the bat toward the trees, setting his hands on his knees as he chokes on the smoke that's growing thicker by the second. He catches sight of Harrington, stumbling a few feet away as he wheezes, holding a hand over his nose and mouth. The dog lets out an unholy shriek but ultimately slumps to the ground, engulfed as it whines.

The next thing Billy spots is El, standing at the other side of the clearing that's untouched by the gasoline, facing a blackened tree that seems to loom over her, a splintered opening at the base of it with *something* oozing out of the mouth in viscous strings. The leaves are scattered in deep mounds, dead and the branches are brittle, bare. El's hands are raised, shaking, and Billy thinks that he can see blood on her face but he needs to get Harrington out of here. He's pretty sure that she can handle the tree for a minute.

Just as Billy gets his arm around Harrington's waist he drops like a stone, legs buckling under his weight as he stops gasping for a breath that isn't saturated in acrid smoke. Billy sets him down, hands coming to grab him under his arms and dragging him desperately toward the treeline. Mike rushes over when he finally gets them both away from the fire.

"Shit, *shit*." Mike's eyes are wide, afraid and they're locked on Steve.

Billy wheezes, breath rattling in his chest as he coughs out the smoke in his lungs. His lungs are aching, burning in his chest and goddamn it, Steve isn't waking up. Billy sits down heavily, still gasping and drags Steve half into his lap, settling his head on his shoulder as he smacks Steve's back. Steve's eyes stay closed and Billy doesn't think he can feel his chest expanding. He sees the blood streaked across

Steve's stupidly bright pullover and there's a stain too dark, too wet to be one of those *things*' he realises as the material sticks to Billy's fingers, warm.

"Fuck. *Fuck. Fuck.*" Billy shakes him and Steve's head lolls back, limp. "Steve, c'mon."

"Billy," Mike croaks, sounding terrified.

"Shut up." Billy rasps, setting a hand on his chest and shoving him back. "Steve. You asshole, wake the fuck up." He absently acknowledges the wetness on his cheeks, the warmth of tears dripping down his face but he doesn't fucking care enough to wipe them away because his hands are too busy clutching at Steve, rubbing his back, brushing the hair from his face feverishly. Billy's too goddamn young to feel like this.

"*Fuck. Steve. Please. Steve.*" Billy bares his teeth as he throws his head back, snarling at the sky. "*I fucking hate you. I fucking hate you. God, I fucking hate-*" He chokes on his breath, voice cracking and fading to a whisper.

Steve wrenches himself up and pukes into the grass. Billy's hands tighten into fists until he's got a death-grip on Steve's goddamn ugly sweater, a grating laugh forced from his chest as he holds onto Harrington like he'll dissipate in tendrils of smoke any second, spluttering and retching as he is.

He doesn't know why he says it but he grinds out, "You have to pick up the kids from the arcade later." He knows he meant *Don't ever fucking scare me like that again.*

Harrington breathes out something like a whistling laugh, shaking his head a little through the coughing. Billy smiles.

He looks up to find El approaching, Mike practically launching himself at her as she grins.

"Closed."

Billy lets out a sigh of relief and Steve slumps into him, groaning.

~

Billy thinks it's stupid, ridiculous just how necessary Harrington had become in just a week.

There are Christmas lights still strung up around the Harrington's living room that they'd probably forgotten to take down. But because he knows better, because he had listened to Tommy when he'd first moved to this shithole of a town, because of how much he's been around the past week, he knows it's more that they weren't around long enough to take them down or to ask their son to. Billy thinks that he'd much fucking rather have absent parents than ones he despised, ones he spent most of his waking hours avoiding. He knows Harrington feels different on that, though, which is why he doesn't say anything when Harrington scowls every time they call.

He's been around enough the past week to know that Steve sometimes turns the lights on, leaving them flaring in bright garish colours throughout the night when he doesn't leave every single light in the house on. Billy used to think he was afraid of the dark but, again, he knows better now.

He sits down beside Steve on the sofa where he's talking to that Henderson kid that really hates his guts on the walkie. "No. Dustin. Dustin." He watches as he rolls his eyes, muttering *teenagers* like he isn't seventeen but seventy. "Apologise to your mom. Don't be a dick."

He knows both he and Steve would kill, *kill* to have a mom like Mrs. Henderson. Billy had met her a few days ago when he'd picked Max up from Henderson's house, grouching when he'd had to knock on the door and plaster on that smile he knew worked on moms like a charm. Mrs. Henderson had opened the door and smiled at him as if he was Jesus Christ reincarnated though, like how his mom had used to smile at him, and he'd been caught a little off guard by it. Henderson had scowled at him over his mom's shoulder as he'd explained Max was his step-sister and she had told him to remember

to wrap up next time, gesturing to his mostly-unbuttoned shirt.

She'd smiled and said, "Teenagers and their fashion. Then again, I nearly broke my neck because of a pair of heels in the sixties."

He'd gone home with a tupperware of lasagna, feeling shell-shocked.

As he sits down, waiting for Henderson to just give it up already and admit he was being a brat, he notices the sofa doesn't crinkle like it used to, soft. Billy thought back to last night when he'd practically had to sit on Steve to get him to stop pacing the room, ranting about how much of an asshole Neil Hargrove was after Billy had shown up on his doorstep like a kicked dog, blood in his mouth and a black eye slowly appearing.

Steve had sighed, saying he was sorry, and god, if he'd said that a week ago Billy might've punched him. Instead, he'd leant down and kissed him, pressing him into the sofa cushions with his bulk. The night had ended with his hand down Steve's jeans, mouth on his neck, and this morning they'd woken up on the sofa, the Christmas lights twinkling, setting the room in a muted glow where spasms of red and green light painted Steve's face as he slept.

Billy thinks that he's happy. God, *Harrington* makes him happy. It had never been about the goddamn monsters that he's never gonna be able to get rid of in his nightmares, it had always been Steve. He could've high-tailed it in the other direction the second he'd seen that goddamn bat in Harrington's hand – probably should have, really. The guy is fucking nuts, and not to mention, seriously fucked up. But Billy doesn't regret anything, he finds. He's glad Harrington's as goddamn fucked up as he is; it makes him feel somewhat normal as Harrington presses against his side, cold again.

He smiles to himself, reaching a hand around Steve's shoulders and pulling him into his side where he can press his mouth against his neck, lapping and biting at the skin to draw those sounds from Steve. He chuckles when he hears Henderson screeching, thinking that he probably didn't need the walkie to make his horror heard. Steve shoves him, shaking his head and telling Henderson to piss off, trying to hide his quiet laughter. He looks over at Billy who's just staring at him, thinking, *how the fuck did it come to this?*